The Right Fit

By Sarah Foote

The inaugural MIT Executive MBA class arrived on campus last fall, with 62 new students studying at MIT approximately every third weekend. These EMBA students are taking newly-acquired skills, entrepreneurial processes, and innovative thinking acquired in the classroom and applying them to solve complex, real-world business challenges at their current positions.

While searching for Executive MBA programs on the Internet, Stephen Sofoul, EMBA ’12, ran across a Google ad for MIT’s EMBA program. He quickly completed the application, was accepted, and has been flying to Cambridge once or twice a month since the start of the program last October.

Stephen is the president of PeopleManage Pro, an HR consulting firm based in Houston that specializes in the design and implementation of group health insurance plans. He also started a consulting firm that helps small business owners with pension, 401(k), and tax strategies.

Stephen spoke to News@MIT Sloan about what he has learned in class, from his classmates, and the challenges of working and going to school at the same time.

Q. Why did you want to pursue an MBA?
A. My business partner and I have been working together for 19 years, sold our first company in 2002, and started our current firm in 2005. Although the business experience felt as though I had already earned an MBA, I was at a point in my life when I was ready to discover a new way of thinking, to look at perspectives from a different angle, and meet and collaborate with a like-minded group of successful leaders.

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Q. Why MIT?
A. I chose MIT Sloan for several reasons. First, I wanted to participate in a program that was a distance away from my work and home life. Although there are many great programs in Texas, I wanted to experience a different way of thinking and meet people from all over the country. The second reason I chose MIT is due to Sloan’s reputation as a leader in teaching quantitative methods of data analysis. Over the past five years I have visited with hundreds of companies that have expressed frustration with their health care costs. I am a firm believer that the next 10-15 years will be all about the data. We intend to grow our company by providing advanced analytics that translates into substantial savings for our clients. After researching the top-tier business schools in the country, MIT was the clear leader in this area.

Q. How long have you been president of PeopleManage Pro?
A. My partner and I started the company in 2005 and I have served as the company’s president since then.

Q. What does your work at PeopleManage Pro involve? How does the company implement group health insurance plans?
A. PeopleManage Pro is a unique company in the group health plan consulting space. It is focused on reducing cost for our clients. We do this by performing in-depth analysis on claims data, utilization, plan design, network efficiency, etc.

Our analysis frequently uncovers millions of dollars of wasted spending as well as needless expenses for employees. We then provide recommendations to our clients and monitor their plan on a monthly basis.

PeopleManage Pro also provides tele-medicine clinics that are specifically designed to connect employees to a medical professional for non-emergency services. Our system is generally located in available office space in the employer’s building and has state-of-the-art video conferencing equipment and a series of diagnostic digital instruments.

Our electronic medical record collects data from the patient visit (typically less than 20 minutes) and then the employee returns to his or her desk. If the doctor or nurse prescribed medication, the prescription can be delivered to the employee’s desk within two to three hours. We can often reduce the time required to see a doctor by as much as 75 percent by providing this convenient and efficient way of connecting employees to a health care provider.

Q. What does your work for TT Financial involve?
A. As the managing partner of TT Financial I oversee all operations. TT Financial is a financial consulting firm that provides business and individual clients with 401(k) plans, defined benefit pension plans, irrevocable life insurance trusts, and many other important financial vehicles. Many of our health clients become financial clients and vice versa.

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Q. How will an MBA assist you in both of your positions?
A. The EMBA program has already paid for itself – even though we are just now in the second semester of the program. Several of the tools and techniques we are studying have direct application to my industry. I have also been fortunate to be able to meet over 60 classmates, each with tremendous skill sets and leadership abilities. They are helping me to see things differently and we support each other every step of the way. I have confidence that I can turn to any of my classmates with a work related problem or dilemma and receive help solving it.

Q. Have any of the classes that you have taken, or are currently enrolled in, been of help to your company?
A. There have been elements of each class that have impacted my work at PeopleManage Pro. A current class, Data, Models, and Decisions (DMD), led by Professor Dimitrius Bertsimas, has been particularly interesting. This class helps me to look at my company’s data analysis techniques and rethink some of the models we designed. Currently, we are enhancing a particular model that I believe will save two of our largest clients over a million dollars each over the next 12 months.

Q. How is the EMBA schedule working out for you?
A. The schedule has been great. I knew when I signed up for this program I would be busy, but I’m learning something new every day and working with tremendous people. So far, we have been able to make it work while the business continues to grow. I had considered an MBA before enrolling in the EMBA program, but a full-time MBA program did not offer the flexibility I needed to perform my responsibilities as president of my company as well as the expected program work. The EMBA program has been the perfect fit for my situation – I travel to Cambridge approximately every third Thursday, attend classes Friday and Saturday, and travel back home late Saturday or early Sunday. I’m back in Houston ready to be in the office first thing Monday morning.

Q. How do you balance it all – schoolwork, family life, and work?
A. I am incredibly blessed in my life to have a supportive wife and four wonderful children (ages two months to 10 years.) My faith and my family are the center of my life. After that comes my work and school work.

Q. Do you get to spend much time with your fellow classmates?
A. The EMBA program emphasizes team work and I have been able to get to know quite a few classmates through teams and the various social functions that have been organized. When in class, we spend roughly 10-12 hours together. Outside of class we work on projects through WebEx or face-to-face strategy sessions. We have also gone bowling together, attended various social gatherings, and plan to see a Red Sox game. I have also been fortunate to come to know my fellow Houston classmates and we have met outside of class.

Q. Do you have any advice for members of the next EMBA class?
A. I would encourage the EMBA Class of 2013 to enjoy the journey. Due to the intense school work load combined with work and home responsibilities, it is easy to feel overwhelmed. But, then I look at my student ID and realize that I am attending MIT! This is an experience that will benefit me, my family, my partners, and my clients for as long as I choose to work. As long as you have the support of your family, whatever the sacrifice, it will be worth it.

Q. What do you like to do in your free time?
A. Back when I had free time I enjoyed playing golf or tennis. I also work on several other startup ideas that we are close to launching.
MIT COOP is taking reservations of Cap and Gowns for Commencement

Congratulations Graduates! Come to the MIT Coop until April 30 to rent or purchase your regalia for the upcoming graduation.

For more information, contact Miguel Suarez, 617-499-3201, or msuarez@mit.edu or visit: http://store.thecoop.com/coopstore/images/MITCapGown.pdf

Double-header DILS Next Week! Jack Welch and Capt. Sully to Speak

On Tuesday, April 26 at 12:00 p.m., Jack Welch, founder of the Jack Welch Management Institute and former CEO of General Electric, will join Dean Schmittlein in a fireside chat as part of the Dean’s Innovative Leaders Series (DILS). A businessman and critically acclaimed author, Jack Welch is arguably one of the greatest business minds and innovators of this generation. In 2000, Fortune named him the “Manager of the Century.” The Financial Times also named him one of the three most admired business leaders in the world today. In addition to his leadership roles, Welch is a highly respected business writer whose publications have been read around the globe, including Winning and his autobiography, Jack: Straight from the Gut, both international bestsellers.

On Thursday, April 28 at 12:00 p.m., Capt. Chesley “Sully” Sullenberger will conclude this semester’s series. Capt. Sully is the heroic pilot who masterfully landed U.S. Airways Flight 1549 on the Hudson River and saved the lives of 155 people. Captain of what has been dubbed the “Miracle on the Hudson,” Sullenberger is an aviation safety expert and accident investigator who also serves as the founder and chief executive officer of Safety Reliability Methods, a consulting company dedicated to management, safety, performance, and reliability consulting.

There will also be an opportunity for a small group of students to attend a private lunch with Capt. Sully immediately following the presentation. To be considered for this opportunity, please send an e-mail as soon as possible to Cessy Cook at crcook@mit.edu and include your name, program, class year, and contact information.

Lunch for both events will be available in Ting Foyer at 11:30 a.m.

The Dean’s Innovative Leader Series is co-sponsored by the MIT Leadership Center and the MIT Sloan Office of External Relations. It brings to campus some of the most influential and innovative leaders from both the public and private sectors who will share lessons learned from their experiences in leading some of the world’s most significant and innovative organizations.

For more information about upcoming events visit: http://mitsloan.mit.edu/corporate/dils.php
CLUB NEWS

Sloan Sales Conference

The Sloan Sales Conference is a day packed with opportunities for students to learn and interact with the best of the best from across the country. This year’s theme is “Selling in a New Normal.”

The panels and workshop will be conducted by executives from Sales 2.0, Microsoft, Cisco, Xerox, Avaya, Hubspot, and more.

Early bird registration for the Sloan Sales Conference is now open. Please visit http://www.sloansalesconference.com/ to register.

This conference takes place Friday, May 6. For more information visit: http://www.sloansalesconference.com/index.php
MIT Sloan students at a Taiwanese cooking class organized by the Happy Belly Club and taught by Ann Chin and Jossy Lee. The Happy Belly Club organizes both student-taught and professional cooking classes.

**CAMPUS CORNER**

**Strait to Taiwan**

Strait to Taiwan is an event designed to bring the MIT community to the beautiful, boisterous country of Taiwan without leaving the campus. The event is set in the middle of the day; the venue is the hallways of Stata (building 32) where hundreds of students, staff, and faculty can see and partake in the festivities as if they were in the middle of one of the many famous, lively markets in Taipei, Taiwan.

This event takes place Wednesday, April 20, 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m., on the Stata Student Street. For more information, contact Stephanie Ku, ats-exec@mit.edu.

*Quote of the Week:*
“*A dollar is not worth as much as you think it is. Your honesty is worth much more.*” — T. Boone Pickens
MOVIES

Now Playing on Campus...

A Beautiful Mind (2001)
Free admission, co-sponsored by Active Minds

The true story of prominent mathematician John Forbes Nash Jr. is the subject of this biographical drama from director Ron Howard. Russell Crowe stars as the brilliant but arrogant and conceited professor Nash. The professor seems guaranteed a rosy future in the early ’50s after he marries beautiful student Alicia (Jennifer Connelly) and makes a remarkable advancement in the foundations of game theory, which carries him to the brink of international acclaim. Soon after, John is visited by Agent William Parcher (Ed Harris), from the CIA, who wants to recruit him for code-breaking activities. But evidence suggests that Nash’s perceptions of reality are cloudy at best; he is struggling to maintain his tenuous hold on sanity, and Alicia suspects a diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia. Battling decades of illness with the loyal Alicia by his side, Nash is ultimately able to gain some control over his mental state, and eventually goes on to triumphantly win the Nobel Prize. Based loosely on the book of the same name by Sylvia Nasar, A Beautiful Mind co-stars Paul Bettany, Adam Goldberg, Anthony Rapp, Christopher Plummer, and Judd Hirsch.

Playing on April 29, at 7:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. in 26-100.

From the Lecture Committee website. Most movies are just $4 but this one is free.

SUSTAINABILITY@SLOAN

Energy Eaters – The Fridge

The typical “bachelor” fridge with just a bottle of ketchup and six-pack of beer may be wasting energy and costing you more in utility costs. That’s because the refrigerator (a main energy offender) runs best when it is full, but not overcrowded. Food will retain the cold, so the temperature doesn’t rise as quickly when the doors are opened. However, if food and drinks are too crammed in, efficiency is lost. If it isn’t feasible for you to maintain a stocked fridge, add some gallon jugs of water. Also, be sure to keep the fridge organized – if you have to stand there and hunt for items with the door open, you are definitely losing energy. Finally, when preparing a meal, refrain from opening the fridge doors each time you have to put away an item. Instead, line up the foodstuff (unless highly perishable) and put it away all at once. (Source: The San Francisco Chronicle)